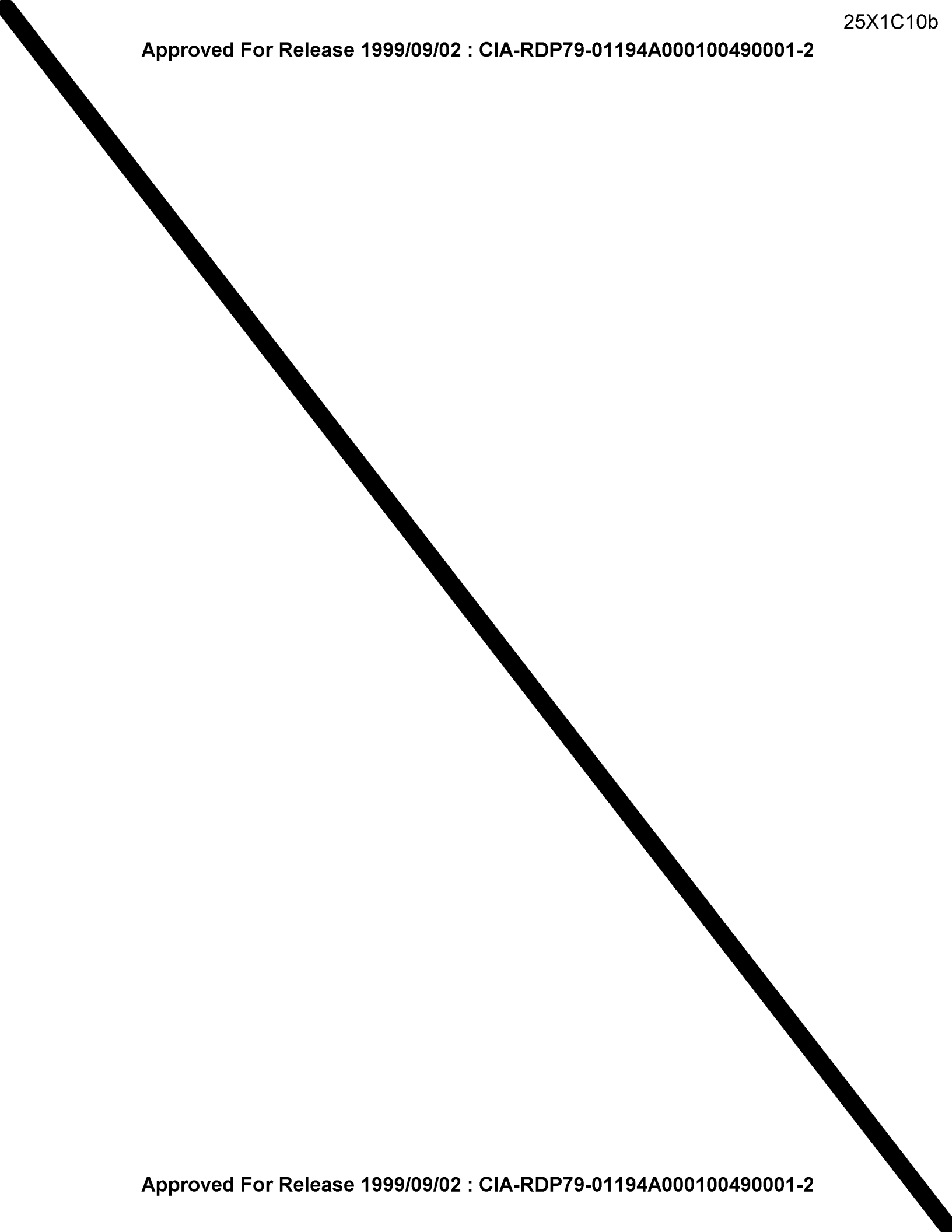

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ASHINGTON POST
10 November 1974

Russia's Troubled 'Free' Medical Care

First of Four Articles

By Robert G. Kaiser
Washington Post Staff Writer

Free medical care is a central element of the Soviet Union's welfare state. The Soviet Ministry of Health presides over a mammoth empire of clinics, hospitals, sanatoriums and medical schools, some with 10,000 students.

In all the state's facilities, health care is free for everyone. No Soviet family need fear that an illness could bring financial difficulties.

But that is not the entire picture. "Our 'free' health care is very, very expensive," one woman complained in Moscow last spring after returning home from the hospital. She had been caring for a sick relative in an overcrowded ward—bathing and feeding him and otherwise doing the work Westerners expect nurses to do.

Several doctors with many years of experience in the Soviet medical system, including recent emigrants from the Soviet Union, granted lengthy interviews, mostly tape-recorded, in Moscow, Israel, Italy and the United States. Those interviewed talked about aspects of Soviet medical care that the government's propagandists don't mention.

First a Moscow surgeon:

"Like everything else in Russia, medicine and medical care exist on many levels. There is medicine in Russia that is up to the best international standards, on the highest levels. There are many good doctors. But as far as free medical care is concerned—well, I think it is the scourge of Russia . . .

"Say 50 people show up for office hours at a neighborhood polyclinic," he continued. "One doctor will handle them all. He or she will have five hours to see them. That's about six minutes per patient. And the patient must undress and dress; he has to tell the doctor what's bothering him; and the doctor has to prescribe something and fill out the 'hospital list.'" the document that excuses the patient from work.

"In other words, the time available is simply insufficient. And what is a doctor thinking about while examining those patients? Often about what he or she has to buy on the way home, and where that product might be found.

"You know, a doctor's favorite kind of patient is a sales clerk from a shop, someone who can help the doctor buy something good.

"And if there is such a thing as a good, serious doctor who thinks about the patients and cares about them, one who isn't daydreaming about a good piece of meat and who gives a patient 20 or 30 minutes of undivided attention, then there will be long lines! People will start complaining to the head doctor, and the head doctor will bawl out this physician who is holding everyone up. In other words, in a typical polyclinic a good doctor is simply unwanted.

"A beginning physician gets 100 rubles a month. [An average industrial worker in the Soviet Union makes 135.] To earn 150 rubles — about the most a physician can earn — the doctor must work a shift and a half, 12 hours a day.

"A young doctor has to study, buy books, maintain a family and himself. Say he pays 12 rubles a month for his apartment, another 7 on transport. If he has a child attending kindergarten, that costs another 15 a month. A doctor has to read certain papers and magazines which cost, say, 6 rubles a month. That's 40 rubles out of his salary right there. And a doctor has no time to do his reading, to keep up with medical science.

"Most doctors are women, who have to take care of husbands and children, do the shopping, the cooking, the ironing and washing . . .

"Why are doctors paid so little? There is no real explanation. Medical care in the Soviet Union is free, and it brings in no income whatsoever. The Ministry of Health must be the poorest ministry . . ."

A FOREIGNER living in the Soviet Union learns about the country's shortage of drugs from Soviet friends who ask for help in acquiring medicines — anything from exotic antibiotics to basic preparations. A foreigner, many Russians think, must have access to good medicine.

Soviet doctors often prescribe drugs that they know are not generally available. A professor of pediatrics from a large provincial city discussed this problem:

"The situation with drugs really is very bad. Bad first of all because it's hard to get them to produce a new kind of medication and because it's a form of industrial production . . . If they've learned how to make aspirin, they'll make it for 30 years without any changes.

"If they decide in the West to stop using aspirin, in Russia they'll keep using it for a long time, because there are working factories making it, and they don't want to interfere with this production . . .

"Soviet medicines are produced to fulfill the Plan — the monthly plan, the yearly plan, and so on. These medicines can be practically devoid of effectiveness . . . An ampule of medicine can actually come to you filled with water, perhaps because the flagon of penicillin the factory received contained less than it was supposed to, or perhaps because the factory wanted to produce 'above-Plan production.'

"If a factory produces vitamins, say, or penicillin, and can make a certain amount of it above their planned targets, then the factory will receive a bonus. It follows easily from there to decide to make the pills a little weaker than they should be, and to make a larger quantity of them — to produce above-Plan production . . . When we see that a medicine has no effect, we often say, 'that must be above-Plan production' . . ."

When a Soviet citizen goes into a hospital, his entire family is affected. Hospital food is unappetizing and ill-suited to some patients' special needs, so families routinely bring sick relatives meals from home. Chores generally performed by nurses in the West are the work of relatives in Russia—or they go undone. A Moscow doctor with experience in numerous hospitals described them at their worst:

"An overcrowded hospital is really something to see. Beds are jammed into the corridors, sometimes so tightly that there is no room to pass through. Beds are put next to the elevators, next to the dining rooms.

"I remember one case when a nurse couldn't find a place for a patient anywhere, and ended up putting him on two tables in the dining room that she pulled together. The next morning other patients came in for breakfast, saw this makeshift arrangement and refused to eat. It was a big scandal. A commission came to investigate . . .

"If you have acute appendicitis and need an urgent operation you will get it—everything will be fine. But if you have some problem that you can live with, but which should be operated on —a small, benign tumor say, which bothers you but which you can live with—you fall into the category of 'planned' operations and don't know when you might get it. You could wait for months, or longer.

"You're likely to get worse treatment in the big cities than in many rural hospitals. In city hospitals, there's a system of duty doctors. For example, the duty surgeon in a hospital may be called upon to perform 15 appendicitis operations during the 24 hours he's on duty. The simplest, most routine appendicitis takes an hour. If there's any complications, it may take an hour and half, or two. It's hard work. At the end of his shift, that surgeon will truly be walking in his sleep.

"If an emergency patient shows up at night, when there are several doctors on duty, the youngest and least experienced is most likely to be called out of bed. And he may not know what he's doing. As a result of this system, the greatest number of accidents and mistakes by doctors occurs in big cities.

"Two years ago there was a meeting of the society of Moscow surgeons which discussed the complications that followed emergency surgery. It turned out that [illegible] per cent of the

patients who underwent emergency appendicitis operations in Moscow died. For the whole country the figure was 0.5 per cent, and there were many rural areas where nobody died from appendicitis at all.

LIKE ALMOST every aspect of Soviet life medical care is reduced to vast tables of statistics. But the doctors interviewed for this article reported that medical statistics aren't always reliable. A professor of pediatrics elaborated:

"It's a fact that child mortality is hidden. It's part of the system of deception — it's universal, natural . . . In a maternity clinic the statistics are often incomplete — in a month, say, 10 children die, but in the record it's registered as six.

"They do it just like that, counting on the fact that no one will investigate their figures in detail, nobody will come looking . . .

"Since the *oblast* health committee [the local branch of the Ministry of Health] knows perfectly well that the system is riddled with deception from top to bottom, they don't make a big thing of it . . . Every *ob last* wants its infant mortality to decline. Nobody wants to look for ways to make it go up . . .

"Sometimes the rates of incidence of certain diseases are artificially increased, sharply increased. Rheumatism, for example. About eight years ago it was suddenly discovered that rheumatism was five or six times more common in Russia than in England. How was this possible? England, with its fog, damp weather and poorly heated buildings had to have a higher rate of rheumatism, and it always did. At one point rheumatism was called "the English disease.' What had happened?

"What happened was they had created so-called rheumatism centers in the big cities of the Soviet Union. The doctors working in these centers were told that the number of service personnel they would have — nurses and so on—would depend on the number of patients that came to see them. If they had, say, 100 patients, they'd get one nurse. 200 patients, two nurses, and so on. So the statistics began to rise.

THE SOVIET government has recognized that some people are dissatisfied with the state health-care system. The Ministry of Health has created paying polyclinics, where people can get a private consultation for a modest fee. In Moscow the paying clinics attract crowds of patients, and long lines are common.

Many Soviet citizens try to make private arrangements for medical care. A friend from school who became a doctor, a relative in medicine or some other informal connection with a good physician can be a prized possession, particularly among the intelligentsia in large cities.

Those without their own personal connections sometimes enter a thriving unofficial medical system outside the state network of clinics. Thousands of Soviet doctors participate in the unofficial system, which amounts to a limited form of private practice.

In some provincial cities the local authorities actively discourage private practice. A physician who practiced in the Ukraine explained how:

"The authorities are actively fighting private practice. They do this in two ways. First, through the organization where the doctor works. They can call him in and say, 'We have become aware that you are conducting private practice. Stop it at once. This is wrong. You receive enough salary.'

" 'But,' he may complain, 'I can't refuse when people come to me for help.' 'Let them go to the polyclinic,' they'll reply.

"The second way is through the 'financial inspector.' If someone goes ahead anyway receiving patients at home . . . they will demand high taxes from him. . . ."

The introduction of money into the practice of medicine upsets some doctors. The money itself seems to bother them less than the hypocrisy of it. A Moscow physician who recently emigrated said it was this that drove him to apply to leave the Soviet Union:

"Because doctors are so poorly paid, they try to find alternative sources of income. This leads to a whole series of ugly and unhappy

ant complications in their relations with patients. The doctor wants to get some extra money, but since this is illegal, the whole business takes on the character of some kind of black-market-eering.

"For instance, you have to have an operation, and you know that ordinarily it will be a three-week business—first tests, then the operation, then recuperation. But you want to get it over with quickly, so you make a date with the doctor, and you both get what you want. But this is offensive to both parties. It's dishonest, unpleasant. And it complicates relations among doctors. You hear complaints, so-and-so took too much, so-and-so didn't take enough, and so on . . ."

Some names and places have been changed in this article to preserve the anonymity of the persons interviewed.

WASHINGTON POST
11 November 1974

Soviet Science: How Good?

Second of Four Articles

By Robert G. Kaiser
Washington Post Staff Writer

In 1957 the Soviet Union launched the first sputnik, and the Western world caught its breath. Were the Russians that far ahead. Was their science that much better?

The fear that those questions had to be answered affirmatively compelled the United States to undertake a crash "catch-up" program. The federal government invested hundreds of millions of dollars in science, and in less than 15 years it was obvious that the Americans had surpassed Soviet space achievement. But had they really been far behind in science?

In extended interviews, scientists in the Soviet Union and others now living in Israel, Italy and the United States who once worked in Soviet science were asked to try to explain to a Westerner how the Soviet system works. This article consists of some of their answers:

A chemist from Moscow discussed the Western world's impression of science in the Soviet Union:

"The Western estimation of Soviet science is wildly exaggerated . . . the absence of real self-criticism and real competition, and the over riding importance of political considerations . . . hold it back. . . .

"One absurd thing in Soviet science is the need to plan your research work five years in advance. You have to say, five years ahead of time, what kind of equipment you'll need, what instruments. In reality, I may be working on one idea today, but if it turns out badly, I'll have to head off in an entirely new direction — but that may not be possible, because the system is so bureaucratic. You won't get anything that isn't planned for . . .

'So what happens? People start hoarding things. For instance, they'll say to you, do you need such-and-such an apparatus? And you'll say no—but go ahead, give it to us, we'll save it just in case it comes in handy. It won't cost you anything, you won't have to answer for it.

"The Soviet Union tries to substitute quantity for quality. For example, they create big scientific institutes. There are institutes with 3,000, 10,000, even 15,000 workers. But I know many institutes whose 'coefficient of useful activity' is precisely zero.

"Just as you can't make an ocean-going liner out of thousands of little sailboats, you can't bring together 10,000 mediocre people without ideas and put them into an institute and call it science. It isn't science. Especially if you put a mediocre fellow at the head of such an institute . . . and there are many of them . . .

"Why? Because the boss is chosen by the Central Committee of the [Communist] Party. He is a good party member. He is very vigilant. If somebody does something [ideologically] wrong, he reports it to higher authority . . . He has the authority of the party behind him. He gathers a group of scientists around him, and they may all try to work, but without a real leader it all just spins around."

A physicist from one of Moscow's most distinguished scientific institutes discussed the role of politics in Soviet science:

"Political barriers exist

and they hinder the normal growth of science. For example, travel abroad to meet with colleagues and to see other laboratories and scientists working in your area is absolutely necessary, but travel abroad is controlled... Those who can travel either are members of the [Communist] Party or have otherwise proven their reliability . . . In order to advance through the ranks of Soviet science you have to be a member of the party . . ."

"And as soon as you're a member of the party," another physicist added, "you'll have to do whatever they tell you to. This affects even competent scientists. For example, I think that the current director of the Institute is a competent guy, no dope. But he has absolutely no conscience or honor. He will contradict today what he told you yesterday.

"That's what makes a Soviet scientist different. When you meet him in the West he is an ordinary, intelligent, good fellow. And when he gets home he'll make up all kinds of dirt about what he saw in the West. He'll concoct whatever is necessary if it serves his career . . ."

A Ukrainian scientist described a more mundane example of political pressure in his provincial city:

"The Soviet authorities want every citizen in the country to read the newspapers . . . but the papers are very boring and one-sided . . . So the authorities force the papers on the citizenry by requiring them to subscribe . . .

"At my institute a professor was called to the party committee, where they said to him, 'You are required to subscribe to five newspapers' —all papers of the same type and in fact they don't mind if you take two subscriptions to the same paper—'and to four magazines,' which you don't need at all, ' and if you don't do it, we'll consider you politically unreliable, with the obvious consquences . . .'"

"And if someone interrupts them and says, 'Excuse me, this is a democratic country, if I want to read I'll read,' they would answer 'If you want to work in this institute, you shouldn't engage in such conversations, you should subscribe to these papers.'"

A scientist from Kiev explained another kind of political pressure:

"Say a director of an institute doesn't have a portrait of Lenin in his office. [Portraits of V. I. Lenin, founder of the Soviet state, are displayed in almost every Soviet official's office.] He just forgot about it. A secretary of the regional party committee drops by, and comments on the fact that there is no portrait of Lenin. The director knows that if he doesn't quickly hang up a portrait of Lenin, his error will be remembered . . ."

Despite political interference, however, Soviet scientist have managed an impressive record of accomplishment, especially in a few fields such as nuclear physics.

According to the physicist from Moscow, these successes are largely attributable to the government's policy of investing almost without limit in priority projects.

"If the director of an institute enjoys influence on high, that is, among party and government big shots, then they listen to him. If he says we have to develop such-and-such, he'll receive the money he needs . . . When they decide something is necessary, they finance it, and it happens."

A scientist who once worked in the institute of nuclear physics in Novosibirsk, one of the most advanced scientific centers in the country, explained how the scientists there competed with Western physicists:

The institute of nuclear physics was set up at Academgorodok ("academic town") outside Novosibirsk in 1958. Its director was G. I. Budker, a gifted physicist, who gathered together a group of innovative intellects without regard for the usual rules of seniority and status that generally govern Soviet science.

For about ten years, until 1968, the institute was extraordinarily productive. It attracted excellent people, in part because Budker could offer them comparatively good apartments, and because an unusual democratic spirit prevailed at Academgorodok.

In that scientific community young intellectuals formed discussion groups and coffee clubs, at which all kinds of subjects—including political topics—were freely discussed. These groups allowed for a kind of debate and discussion that is traditionally impossible in the Soviet Union.

Budker's imagination guided the institute into fruitful and hitherto unexplored scientific territory. But the institute had trouble conducting its experiments, because it could not easily acquire sophisticated equipment it needed. For unique experiments involving colliding beams, the institute established its own little industry to produce the required equipment.

Soon after that work began, this physicist recalled, several groups in Westrn Europe and America began similar experiments. It quickly became obvious to the scientists in Academgorodok that the Westerners would outdistance them because they had better equipment for experiments.

When they saw what was happening, Budker and his colleagues tried to jump ahead of the foreigners by heading off in a radically new direction, but they failed.

"You have to move quickly and skim off the cream," the physicist said, discussing the ground-breaking research he had participated in. "Soon the Western scientists will catch up with you. And this doesn't depend on how smart you are. It's because of the low level of our technology."

Budker"s secret, he said, was that his imagination continued to produce new ideas, and the pursuit of these ideas kept his scientists on the frontiers of international physics. To continue to receive priority in Soviet science, the physicist said, a laboratory or institute must continue to stay up with the world leaders in its field.

Budker's institute began to lose its standing in 1968. The political climate changed sharply that year, after the Soviet invasion of Czechoslavakia, and the institute in Novosibirsk was getting older, more bureaucratized and more conservative. Today, the physicist said, it is no longer the exciting and experimental institution it once was. And the coffee clubs and discussion groups have disbanded.

Another physicist, who worked in one of the Soviet Union's leading laboratories, elaborated on the problem of inadequate technology:

"It can happen that one crucial area holds back others. For example, it is well known that the Soviet Union is far behind in computers. And without computer technology, realistically, there can't be significant progress in chemistry, physics, phisical chemistry. You can't just develop computers by yourself, it takes a long time, so you turn to foreigners. You turn to Americans, who can provide big computers . . .

"I think the greatest barrier to the development of Soviet science now is the inadequacies of certain branches of industry, which cannot provide the necessary equipment and supplies for science. It's like a vicious circle: science can't give industry what it needs because industry can't give science what it needs, and so on.

To break out of this circle now, to get the sophisticated equipment, computers and so forth, they must buy Western things. On the other hand, you may be able to buy one, two, three computers for the leading institutes, but to create a broadly based computer science you have to begin producing computers at home.

"I'm sure that the military people are also concerned, because without good, relatively cheap computers, all their rockets and ships and so on aren't worth much...".

According to all of these scientists, prestige is an important factor in Soviet science. One chemist recounted how prestige effected the commercial use of Soviet microbiology:

"I worked in microbiological industry. We had it because it existed abroad—therefore, the Soviet Union had to have it also.

"Some theoretical scientists porposed that they could make artificial protein from oil for much less than the cost of any known form of natural protein. But the doctors said they could not approve the use of this artificial protein to feed people.

"So the scientists said, 'O.K. we'll give it to animals.' Again, the doctors refused to permit it, saying that a lot of carcinogens [cancer-producing substances] had been found in the organs of animals who had eaten the protein.

"Then the scientists said tell us which organs retain these carcinogens, and we'll cut them out of the animal and throw them away. And they all agreed on that compromise. They knew they shouldn't have accepted it, but they did.

"Why? First of all they knew the government wanted to be able to say, 'Look, we created a whole new branch

of industry. And they could brag about the great savings in the production of protein. So they started producing the stuff, knowing it might be poison. And none of the officials involved had the power to stop it. Occasionally an individual refused to go along . . . So it was done without him."

Some names and places have been changed in this article to preserve the anonymity of the persons interviewed.

WASHINGTON POST
12 November 1974

Soviet Industry: Working by 'The Plan'

Third of Four Articles

By Robert J. Kaiser
Washington Post Staff Writer

Available statistics show the Soviet Union's enormous economy as second in size and strength only to America's. The Soviets now produce more steel than the United States does. They are the world's masters of hydroelectric power, railroad transportation and coal-mining.

The size and scope of Soviet industry impresses outsiders; foreigners are less interested in, and less able to see, how that industry actually works.

A Moscow chemist recently provided a glimpse of the inner workings of a Soviet factory:

"I knew a guy who was the head of a shop in the construction plastics combine in Moscow. He thought up a way to save a great deal of very expensive epoxy in the production process—a colossal saving. But he never said anything about it.

"For one thing, to get a new method like that approved would take, at the very least, six months. Moreover, no one would want to take responsibility for approving a change in the production method. What if it didn't work out? So he just started doing it his new way, quietly, without telling anybody.

Of course, he started to accumulate a great reserve of epoxy, because he was still receiving the amount he needed for the old process. He used to give it away to people who needed it, or trade some for a bottle of vodka. But then he began to worry about the possibility of a spot inventory check by the authorities. They might say, 'How come you've got all this extra epoxy?' It made him nervous . . ."

That chemist was one of a number of Soviet technicians and administrators who talked of their experiences in Soviet industry in tape-recorded interviews in the Soviet Union, Italy, Israel and the United States. Each of those questioned was asked to describe aspects of the Soviet economy outsiders ordinarily do not see.

No single generalization adequately describes all of Soviet industry. Some modern factories in the Soviet Union compare favorably with any in the West, but many others work like the Moscow construction plastics combine.

An engineer who worked in a Soviet factory that produced electrical equipment for ocean-going ships described the factory's work:

"I've been working in the technical [i.e., quality control department . . . All the factory's production goes through our section. We check that it's working all right, and adjust it when it isn't—in other words, we do more than just look at it.

"Our month goes like this: For the first 20 days of the month we do absolutely nothing; we wait for various parts to reach us from the different shops, but they all work on the same kind of schedule.

"In the whole factory, on the first, second, third, maybe fourth of the month, everybody is resting up from the rush to fulfill the previous month's Plan." All Soviet factories are legally obliged to meet the production targets — "the Plan" — set for them by central authorities. "On the fifth or sixth, people start cranking up to do a little something . . . but the production lines aren't working yet. On the 10th, maybe the 12th, they start looking for the parts and materials that will go into the month's production . . .

"During this first part of the month they'll also be correcting the mistakes made in the previous month's production . . . Somewhere round the 15th or 16th, the various shops [illegible] producing something. But nothing reaches our department that soon.

"Maybe about the 20th we begin to receive the first finished production for checking. We start working on it at a relaxed pace. But then, somewhere between the 22d and the 25th or so, the storm begins. And then do we work! Checking, fixing, adjusting—like crazy!

"It gets more and more intense on the 29th, 30th, 31st if there is one. It's a good month when there's a 31st. Most workers work a shift and a half or two shifts during those last days of the month. Our department works as much as we're needed, sometimes around the clock.

"It's dangerous, of course, but nobody ever says anything about that. At the beginning of the month there are always people around talking about safety, talking about maintenance and all that stuff. But at the end of the month we never see any of those people . . . They all disappear . . .

"So we receive the production right at the end of the month, often on the very last day, and often it doesn't work, something is wrong with it. It often takes us into the first few days of the next month to get it working properly.

"Meanwhile, of course, somebody is waiting for our products. There's a shipyard next to our factory that makes ships using our electrical equipment. Several other shipyards around the country depend on our stuff.

"But we don't ship it out until the very end of the month, maybe even in the first few days of the next month. And a lot of it is crap, because we simply can't check out an entire month's production in a few days . . . Our mistakes screw up those other factories—they can't do their work without our products. . .

"You know, there's a popular saying among Soviet workers that I think is very revealing: 'What are they going to do, shoot us?' That's what they say when the paint is a little sloppy, or something isn't just as it should be."

A MAN WHO worked in a factory that made prefabricated sections of reinforced concrete for the Soviet [illegible] that enterprise:

"In our shop we made the metal frames around which the concrete was poured . . . The shop was all cluttered and confused—there was no production line at all, it seemed. The organization of labor was terrible.

"There was no ventilation. In the winter it was cold and the windows had to be kept closed. When it started to get warmer the management had to remove the windows, or the workers would break them out themselves. .

"A majority of the workers in our shop were women. They did really heavy work, much heavier than they are supposed to according to the regulations. I was a safety engineer, but there was very little I could do in the way of making things safer. . .

"We were supposed to work 41 hours a week, but in fact we worked a lot more. They kept people after work, especially in our shop, and if they were falling behind the Plan they'd make people work on Saturdays, too. This happened a lot. Instead of having four free Saturdays a month, the way we were supposed to we had one or two.

"They had two Plans to fulfill: a production Plan simply square meters of reinforced concrete, and then a 'realization' Plan, which stipulated a certain level of sales to construction organizations or to other factories. I worked there for most of 1972, and from month to month they usually fell short in actual production. But they just added the needed amount in their reports, and always fulfilled the Plan. On paper.

"But the important thing is that they were putting out defective stuff on purpose. A lot of it wouldn't have qualified for any category of quality, it was junk . . . The director and other officials always talked openly about the fact that we were producing junk . . . But the construction organizations had to build their targeted number of apartment houses, so they made do with what we gave them. And it would hold up the required weight it didn't collapse on them.

"Nevertheless, junk worth 80,000 to 100,000 rubles [$108,000 to $135,000 at the official exchange rate] was returned to the factory every year by users who

fused to accept it. But we had a very clever lawyer at the factory who could juggle with this and bring the figure of reported returns down to about 30,000 rubles' worth. He did this in various ways."

For example, the people who got the stuff had only a certain amount of time in which to complain about it. If they missed the deadline, they were stuck with it. Or the lawyer could make various kinds of deals and adjustments to keep the users happy. . .

"We had a huge turnover of workers. There were 480 positions for workers in the factory, and during 1972 about 560 people were hired, and the same number quit. There were some senior workers, brigade leaders and so on, who had been there for many years. They were the most important workers.

"But a lot of the others would just come for a couple of months, see how hard it was, and move on to another job. . ."

ONE ASPECT of Soviet industry that strikes foreigners is its ability to produce truly impressive products, at least in some fields. The quality of Soviet tanks is beyond dispute; rockets and bombs also seem to work reasonably well. At industrial exhibits in the West, Soviet products sometimes look as good as equivalent Western equipment, or better.

The achievements of Soviet military industry, these interviews suggest, can be attributed to a huge concentration of resources coupled with rigid quality control. An engineer from a factory that made electrical equipment for ships, including ships for the Soviet navy explained:

"Curiously, the standards for ordinary production and the standards for military production are identical—what changes is how strictly they're adhered to. In our factory it would have been simply impossible to maintain the high level of quality control on all our production that we achieved on our military orders . . .

"The bosses all listen when the customer is from the navy . . . The navy people don't mess around. An ordinary customer is different. You can say, 'Take it easy, we'll have it ready for you tomorrow,' things like that, but the navy man won't listen to that kind of talk.

"The stuff we made for the military was much better than the ordinary production simply because we checked every single part, every detail as it was put together. Of course it took much longer to make it that way—twice as long, maybe three times, because we checked it all out so carefully. . ."

The Soviet Defense Ministry stations officers in the factories that produce armaments and other equipment for the military, and these officers are empowered to reject any item they find unsatisfactory. In effect, this gives the military a virtually unlimited budget to maintain the quality of equipment made for it, while the civilian economy must accept vastly lower standards.

Military equipment is not the only product Soviet industry can produce that impresses outsiders. Soviet turbines, some lines of Soviet steel and some Soviet machine tools, among others, have been lavishly praised by Western experts.

Some of these products come from the several dozen leading factories in the country—enterprises with large budgets, the latest Western equipment and excellent reputations. These factories are a necessary part of the system, one Soviet engineer suggested, as examples to the ordinary enterprises of how good things could be. However, he added, the state could not afford the cost of running all its enterprises on the standards that prevail in these showpiece factories.

By devoting great resources to isolated projects, the Soviet economy can also custom-make products that other economies mass produce. This may explain how the Soviets make rockets and atomic missiles, for example.

A Moscow physicist described an experience he had with one impressive piece of machinery:

"My Moscow apartment is near the Exhibit of Economic Achievement," a permanent show of machinery and other exhibits extolling Soviet industry and agriculture. "A colleague came to me one day and said I should go to the exhibit and look at a new centrifuge that had appeared there—a beautiful machine, he said, and just what we needed for something we were working on at the time.

"So I went. It looked great, everything about it worked well. I asked the people there what factory made the thing. They gave me a name and I wrote it down. During the next few months I went from factory to factory, and sent my colleagues from factory to factory, trying to track down the maker of that centrifuge.

"It turned out that no factory made it. That one had been made as a custom model—custom-made for an exhibition that is supposed to show the progress of the national economy!

"Finally I found somebody I knew in a scientific institute who had worked on the centrifuge. Really, I said, when will such a machine be available? Not earlier than five years from now, he said."

Some names and places have been changed in this article to preserve the anonymity of the persons interviewed.

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Education in U.S.S.R. Dominated by Politics

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Before the Bolshevik Revolution, higher education in Russia was available only to a tiny minority of the population. In the 57 years since 1917, universities and colleges have blossomed all over the Soviet Union, and millions of students are now enrolled.

But the statistics of Soviet education tell nothing about its substance. Authorities in Israel, which has absorbed nearly 100,000 Soviet emigres in recent years, have found that a Soviet education is narrow and often inadequate. Soviet graduates "know much too much about much too little," says Schlomo Rosen, the Israeli minister of absorption of immigrants.

From the first grade, Soviet education is rigorous and inflexible. An American teacher who was allowed to spend many weeks in Moscow classrooms concluded that the children successfully mastered reading, basic arithmetic and other skills.

"But by the time they go off to college," this American teacher said, "they don't know how to think."

This article consists of extended comments of present and former Soviet intellectuals, some interviewed in Moscow, others in their new homes in Israel, Italy and the United States. All of them studied or taught in Soviet colleges and universities. They addressed their comments to weakness in the Soviet educational system.

Like almost every aspect of Soviet life, education has been politicized. A graduate student at Moscow State University explained part of what that means in a recorded interview:

"In recent years they've undertaken a campaign to 'improve the social structure of the student body' [at Moscow State, the Soviet Union's leading university]. What does that mean? In effect, that they choose students from those elements of society that they think are the most loyal. They do this by taking them into a special preparatory faculty without their passing any of the regular university entrance exams. And from there they pass into the university.

"And whom specifically are they picking? It turns out that their ideal 'proletariat' consists of people from the countryside, small towns and villages. The urban proletariat, it seems, is already dubious. At least its sons and daughters don't get the same preference as rural kids.

"The people they chose are recommended by [Communist] Party organizations . . . There is a pretext of examining their knowledge. A friend of mine is a math teacher, and she sat in

on one of the meetings they hold with these kids to find out how much they know. They were asking the simplest questions—things people ought to learn in the seventh grade. But one of them couldn't even answer that stuff, and my friend pointed out how little he knew. They bawled her out for not following the general line. That guy got admitted.

"You know what is worst of all? The kids who get into the university this way understand exactly why they were admitted, and they take advantage of it. They know they can't possibly be kicked out of school.

"A teacher can't give them a failing grade. If he did, he'd be called into the party committee and chewed out. And so you see 17-year-old kids who already realize that in this country, in this system, you don't need to know anything—to have any real knowledge—in order to get ahead. All you have to do is join the party. They call it a 'clever move' to join the party as soon as they can."

A professor at a medical school in the Ukraine recounted his experiences:

"The students who enter a college or university—with the exception of a tiny percentage—are virtually guaranteed that they will successfully finish and graduate.

". . . I was considered a bad examiner. There was a time when the dean tried to prevent me from giving examinations. I gave a large percentage of low marks. I always felt that since we were dealing with future physicians, their level of knowledge had to be reasonably high . . .

"This led to a lot of unpleasantness for me. I was summoned to the dean and to the party committee. They demanded that my marks be higher, that my average mark be a four [the equivalent of a B]. At the time my average grade was a little less than three [that is, just less than passing] . . ."

A student at the medical institute in Irkutsk, the principal city in Eastern Siberia, also discussed why it was easy to get through school:

"The first two years of medical school are devoted to general subjects. [In the Soviet Union, a student goes directly from secondary school into medical school for a six-year course.] In the third year you begin to work in hospitals and clinics. From the third year on, it's enough just to attend the classes. No matter if you never study, from then on nobody get flunked out.

"Why? Well, they talk about the fact that by then they've already spent a lot of money on the student. But that isn't the main thing. They have a plan. According to the plan, they're supposed to graduate a fixed number of doctors. That's the main thing. That's why they admit twice as many as they need to graduate. Even so, they often fail to fulfill the plan because students flunk out in the first two years, or drop out later.

"A student can say on an exam [examinations in the Soviet Union are generally oral], 'I don't know,' and the professor will tell him the answer, saying, 'Don't you remember how it was explained in the lecture?'

"I saw this happen once. The student said, 'Yes, yes, I remember,' and they gave him a three [the passing grade]. This is particularly true for the sixth year. In the sixth year, medical students do absolutely nothing, really . . .

"So how can there be good doctors in Russia? There really are good doctors, a lot of them. First of all students who want to study can study . . .

"After graduation, even those who don't study find themselves working as doctors, maybe in a village somewhere, where they'll work as therapists, surgeons, pediatricians, gynecologists, dermatologists—all at the same time. They may be the only doctor for six hundred miles. So through practical experience they become real doctors . . ."

THERE ARE colleges and universities in the Soviet Union with reputations better than the rest, rough equivalents of Oxford and Cambridge or Harvard and Yale. One of the most famous is the Moscow State Institute for International Relations, a "closed" college under the direction of the Foreign Ministry. The sons and daughters of high officials are often found among the students there. The school trains young people for careers in diplomacy, foreign trade and journalism.

A graduate of the institute talked about life there in a recorded interview:

"The school was dominated by one goal, the one dream that was held up before all of us, the possibility of a trip abroad for practice work. A lot of the students were ready to do whatever was necessary to make that trip abroad—to study well, to do all the right things in the Komsomol (the Young Comunist League] and so on.

"The chance to go abroad comes in the first half of the fifth [i.e., final] year in school . . . That's the big issue from the first year on. You *may* be able to go abroad—the chance exists. But less than half the students end up going . . .

"I went there because I didn't want a technical education; I wanted a general education in the humanities. But you know what kind of stuff they teach there—one year of math, which you soon forgot; some accounting; then the history of the party, Marxism-Leninism and so on. A lot of it wasn't really political; it was more ideological, and completely useless.

"The only good thing was foreign languages. They did that well. There was a good language lab, equipped with Norwegian tape recorders. . . . Everybody had to study two languages . . .

"We all had military training too. I'm a lieutenant myself—a military translator. My specialty is interrogating prisoners. They taught us about Western armies, about their weapons. Everybody had to do it, except the girls. They could do it if they wanted to . . .

"It's a 'closed institute.' That means there is no public announcement inviting people to apply. It doesn't appear on the list of ordinary colleges. And when you apply you have to give them a *'kharakteristika'*—a recommendation — from your local regional committee of the Komsomol . . .

"There are a lot of extra meetings when you're applying to get in. First a meeting with the Komsomol, then at the institute. Then you take the exams, and have still another meeting afterward. They use that last one as a way to weed out people they don't want, even if they passed the exams. They do it by asking some clever, impossible questions. One girl was asked to list all the British military bases in the world. She knew a lot of them, but not all . . .

"When I was a student, the son of Shcholokov was a student too. [Nikolai A. Shcholokov is the Soviet minister of interior, which means he is in charge of the country's vast internal security forces, apart from those of the Committee for State Security, the K.G.B.] Everybody knew that he was the son of Shcholokov . . . He was a handsome, big playboy.

"His papa gave him a white Mercedes while he was still a student. (Such cars are not available in the Soviet Union, except to the highest officials.) He drove it to the institute, but the teachers and his papa stopped him from doing that. They cut it out pretty fast. He only appeared a few times in the car—it caused a big sensation . . .

"He seemed like a regular guy. He didn't study very much. But he became an unprecedented case. They let him stay for a second senior year so he could graduate. He couldn't pass the exams the first time. Ordinary people don't get a second chance.

"They tried to send him abroad for his practice work, but a lot of countries refused to let him in. That was very demoralizing for the rest of the students, to see that the son of Shcholokov couldn't go anywhere overseas. He finally went to some small country . . .

"Now he's the secretary of the institute's Komsomol committee . . . That's a very big job. The committee is above everybody else . . . They decide on all trips abroad, anyone who wants to go overseas has to have the Komsomol's permission . . . All personnel matters go through the Komsomol secretary. And he has the opportunity to travel abroad. He has a lot of power . . .

"If you look at the student body, you see that they are children of the privileged class . . . You can see whose children are admitted before the entrance exams when, for instance, generals come into the school wearing all their medals, and go right to the rector's office. They come out after a while, confident that

their sons will be admitted.

"Nevertheless, the school makes a show of choosing the students democratically. They say they're not going to admit people 'from above' —that's when important people call each other by phone to arrange things outside of official channels . . .

"There were also children of ordinary workers and very simple people in the student body. The institute has recruiters who visit every (Soviet republic. They go to the local Komsomol meetings, for instance, and solicit applications . . . We had a lot of good people who got in that way . . .

"There was a strong caste system. Children of important people stick together; they don't mix with the rest. This extends to marriage. The son of the assistant dean of the institute, say, might marry the daughter of the director of the Bank for Foreign Trade . . .

"I'm personally convinced that none of them believed in anything, not in anything at all . . . There weren't any really convinced Communists . . . They're careerists, that's the best word for them. The way that system works, they come out of the institute right into careers that are waiting for them. They know what it will be like—they've heard already from their parents . . . They know precisely what they want—to live well, to travel abroad. It's a privileged class, and they want to stay in it. And of course, that has nothing in common with communism.

"Once after I graduated from the institute I was out with a girl who took me to the apartment of somebody she knew who was still a student there. There was a darkened room with 10 or 15 people sitting around. These were the 'golden youth,' as we called them. The apartment was very big and luxurious by Soviet standards.

"Everybody chewed gum, sat there and listened to the record of 'Jesus Christ Superstar.' That's sort of a typical scene: everything there was unavailable to an ordinary citizen—the chewing gum, the big apartment, the good foreign record. They already knew the record by heart, they sang along with the chorus."

One aspect of higher education in the Soviet Union is familiar to American ears. An undergraduate at a big Soviet institute explained it:

"I think physical education is the most influential department in the institute. When I was in the first and second years of school I was a good student, and they make the good students help the bad ones . . . One girl athlete was assigned to me, and came to me for help all the time.

"She was a master of sport, a champion ice skater, a racer. She was already pretty old—33, I think. She came to the institute after working for some years; she got in through the 'workers' faculty,' . . . a year's special course to prepare people for college: workers and farm workers. . . .

"From the age of 15 to about 25, that girl had been a really good skater. When she was studying on the workers' faculty she announced that she would compete in sports competitions for the honor of the institute. And the physical education department had a lot of influence.

"It could ask the other departments not to flunk such-and-such a student because his or her athletic abilities were needed for the honor of the school. They usually did this through the deans of the various departments. Everybody wants the institute to do well . . . An athlete who had some success was in a great position . . . If you were really a good skater, you could skate all day, all the time, and still pass all your exams . . ."

Some names and places have been changed in this article to protect the anonymity of the persons interviewed.